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SUBJECT: PRAGUE HAS LOW-KEY RESPONSE TO AUSTRIAN BORDER
BLOCKADE OVER NUCLEAR PLANT

REF: VIENNA 3482

¶1. SUMMARY. (U) Austrian opponents of nuclear power blocked two border crossings with the Czech Republic on Sunday, December 3, to protest the November 3 administrative licensing of the Temelin Nuclear Power Plant. The anti-nuclear protest was one of the largest since the plant began trial operations at its first unit six years ago and resulted in considerable media coverage and an MFA protest to the Austrian Ambassador. However, the Czechs do not expect to make any changes at the plant nor to elevate the dispute. END SUMMARY

¶2. (SBU) The latest controversy was triggered by something called a kolaudace, an official acknowledgment that a building was constructed in accordance with a design approved earlier. Although each of the units at Temelin has been producing power for several years, the kolaudace for Temelin was issued on November 3, 2006. The most recent bilateral meeting between Czech and Austrian officials took place on November 7. Milos Tichy from the Office for International Cooperation at the State Office for Nuclear Safety, the nuclear regulator, said it was one of the quickest meetings ever, with very few questions or controversies. According to Tichy, the Austrian officials didn't even raise the issue of the kolaudace. Tichy added that there was a two-day inspection tour of Temelin for the Austrians at the beginning of September.

¶3. (SBU) Temelin is covered in the 2001 Melk Agreement between the Czechs and the Austrians. Put simply, Melk says the Czech side will fulfill a list of agreed security requirements, and in return, the Austrians will prevent political steps such as border blockades. Tichy points out the Melk Agreement does not contain any mention of the Kolaudace. Tichy explained his office feels that the kolaudace is an administrative step that does not reflect any change in the plant's safety status. He explained the safety permits were issued many years ago, before any fuel was loaded and any power produced. Tichy argues that nothing has happened on the Czech side to violate the terms of the Melk Agreement.

¶4. (U) The blockades, for one hour at the Gmuend-Ceske Velenice crossing and for more than six hours at the Wullowitz/Dolni Dvoriste crossing, received significant coverage on Czech TV and in the national daily newspapers. On December 4, Deputy Foreign Minister Tomas Pojar summoned Austrian Ambassador Margot Klestil-Loeffler to discuss the issue and request that the Austrians respect the fundamental freedom of movement for people and goods. While unhappy with the blockades, the Czechs, don't want to see this taken out of a bilateral context and say they will resist any effort to elevate the matter to the EU level. The Ministry of Foreign

Affairs made no mention of the blockade, or the diplomatic meeting, on its website.

¶15. (SBU) Czech officials tend to see the blockades as a domestic Austrian issue, though the anti-nuclear movement has supporters on both sides of the Czech-Austrian border. Tichy felt that this was the first time Austrians have publicly acknowledged funding the Czech anti-nuclear group, "Jihoceske Matky" or "Mothers Against Temelin," led by the Deputy Chair of the Green Party, Dana Kuchtova. The Greens entered parliament for the first time in June, 2006, with a publicly declared position against nuclear power, though they have made no progress on the issue.

¶16. (U) Temelin has two 1000MW pressurized water reactors, making it the largest power plant in the Czech Republic. Along with the nuclear plant at Dukovany, which has four 440MW reactors, the two have 3760MW of capacity and produce more than 30% of the nation's electricity, some of which is exported to neighboring countries, including Austria. By contrast, the largest coal-fired plant, at Prunerov, has only 1490MW of capacity. Shutting down Temelin, and not even the Greens are pressing for this, is not a realistic option in the eyes of most Czech politicians.

GRABER